

GUIDE

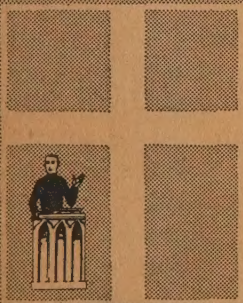
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Developments in the Convert Apostolate

How did convert making become officially recognized as an integral part of the pastoral ministry, requiring distinctive techniques, study and training?

John A. O'Brien

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1960, No. 150



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IT SEEMS TO ME

Congratulations, Chicago!

The Apostolate to non-Catholics in our country advanced by many long strides as a result of the Conference on Adult Catechetics held in Chicago. To all who planned it so thoroughly we extend our warm, sincere congratulations.

With the blessing and direction of Cardinal Meyer (who was one of the principal speakers) it was conducted by the Foundation for Adult Catechetics and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine of Chicago. Some four hundred priests, representing dioceses from Florida to California, found it informing, eminently practical and deeply inspiring.

Something of the latent, largely untapped interest and enthusiasm of American Catholics for this apostolate revealed itself on the second evening. After a stirring keynote speech by Bishop Fulton Sheen in the Grand Ballroom of the Sherman Hotel crowded with clergy and laity, he offered to answer questions. A full hour later, he was still answering queries on his personal experiences with inquiring non-Catholics! Nor was this all. Immediately afterwards, despite a satisfying banquet and the late hour, over two hundred priests gathered to hear Father George Hagmaier speak on "The Psychology of Conversion."

Thought provoking talks were given by Bishop Greco on the "Apostolate of Good Will," Father Weigel on the "Mentality of the Present Day Inquirer" and Father De Vault on "Teaching Christ from the Scriptures." And workshops ranged from prosaic but indispensable matters like "Recruiting for Classes" to "The Liturgy in the Catechumenate."

These delegates came not to bewail our relative ineffectiveness nor to congratulate each other on our gains. They came to ask questions, to share problems and solutions, and to learn. They actually applauded a panel of converts who, with urbanity (thank heavens!) yet with penetration, discussed certain defects in our manner of instructing inquirers.

Let's have more of these conferences, large and small.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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Developments in the Convert Apostolate

By John A. O'Brien

To perceive and appreciate the significant developments in the convert apostolate it will be well to take a brief look at the conditions prevailing in this field a half century ago. So many millions of immigrants had streamed to our shores that the lion's share of the energy of bishops and priests and the resources of the faithful were devoted to the urgent task of erecting churches, schools, convents and rectories to minister to their religious and educational needs. Under the wise and judicious leadership of Cardinal Gibbons, the Church had grown enormously in the respect and esteem of the general public; in increasing numbers Catholics were attaining positions of prominence in the business, political, social and cultural life of the nation.

The task still uppermost in the mind of the Church was not, however, that of winning converts but of holding her own by providing for their essential needs. The Church was not simply *at* the brick and mortar stage, she was *in* it up to her shoulders. If one scans the Catholic periodical literature at the turn of the century, he will find few allusions to the convert apostolate. Indeed in looking over the field as a young priest in 1916, we could find not a single book, pamphlet or magazine article on techniques of instructing prospective converts or of recruiting them.

Yet the need was there, clamorous and inexorable. The tide of immigration had already passed its peak and was destined in a few decades to dwindle to a mere trickle. Aside from increase through births, the Church's expansion must come increasingly from the assimilation of the ever

mounting number of the millions outside the fold. This would demand a knowledge of their peculiar psychology, their fears and prejudices concerning Catholics: it would require a pooling of the experience of those priests who had been most successful in winning them.

By 1926 we had located nine such priests. Among them were Fathers Hugh McMennamin of Denver, A. B. C. Dunne of Eau Claire, and Joseph Eckert, S.V.D., of Chicago, with totals of more than a thousand converts apiece. This was at a time when the average number of converts per priest was but 1.5 per year. Wanting not a theoretical but a practical, down-to-earth treatment of convert making, we prevailed upon these busy shepherds to describe their methods and had them published the following year in *The White Harvest* (Longmans, Green & Co.). To the best of our knowledge it was the first systematic treatment of techniques of recruiting and instructing prospective converts ever published. In concluding chapters we endeavored to synthesize the various procedures outlined by each of these two basic phases of convert work so that the neophyte in the pastoral ministry would have a sort of guide or blueprint before him.

"This book," said Bishop Francis Clement Kelley in his foreword, "is a symposium of a new uneasiness and anxiety—uneasiness about ourselves and anxiety about others. It is not, however, a symposium to give us trouble but to give us consolation. When we worried only about what we had, we were doing only half the worrying Our Lord wanted us to do. So it really gives me pleasure to present these gentlemen and ask that they be given a hearing. They are not going to say the last word on the subject of 'How to Convert,' but they are going

to say a useful word, a needed word, a consoling word and a word that many have waited long to hear."

We were somewhat chagrined when the publishers priced the book at \$3.50—a stiff price 32 years ago—and likely to keep it from young priests and seminarians—the very ones who needed it most. So after six months or so we purchased the stock and the plates, reduced the price drastically, exhausted the supply, and brought out several one-dollar soft covered editions. From our own office we disposed of thousands of these, placing them in quantities in virtually every major seminary in this country as well as in the American colleges in Rome and Louvain.

At Kenrick the seminarians formed a Brownson Club and studied and discussed *The White Harvest* from cover to cover. As a result they were qualified to start immediately after ordination upon a vigorous and fruitful convert apostolate. One of them, Father (now Bishop) Charles H. Helmsing, averaged fifty converts annually for the first ten years of his ministry: a striking verification of the old adage, "Knowledge is power."

Pope Pius XI sent his warm commendation of the volume and his blessing upon all who used it. The letter, sent by the then Secretary of State, was signed E. Cardinal Pacelli. Hence the document conveys the approbation of two pontiffs, the contemporary one and a future one.

Convert making was thus officially recognized as an integral part of the pastoral ministry, but a part with distinctive techniques which require special study, training and discipline. Convert making as a distinctive art had shed its swaddling clothes and had come of age. It now began to find its hesitant way into seminary curricula and into the studies of shepherds of souls.

The contributors to this symposium had stressed two points of prime importance: 1. The secret of success in recruiting prospects for the Inquiry Class lay in publicizing it in every possible manner and in enlisting parishioners or recruiters. 2. The secret of winning considerable numbers of converts was the holding of an Inquiry Class two nights a week, thus completing three or four courses a year. The experience of the intervening years has but served

to underline the truth of those two basic conclusions.

Against the backdrop of convert making coming of age as a specialized art some thirty years or so ago, let us ask, What are the significant developments since then? We shall enumerate: 1. Those of a general nature. 2. Those pertaining to the recruiting of prospects. 3. Those relating to their instruction. 4. Those of a specialized character.

Here we would list the factors which have helped to project convert making into the forefront of our attention, making us all convert-minded. The first of these is the marked increase in space given by Catholic newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and books to convert making in general, to individual conversions, the activities of well-known converts, and the reclamation of inactive and lapsed Catholics.

Helping to alert non-Catholics to the life-giving truths of the Catholic faith are the splendid advertisements run by the Knights of Columbus in national magazines. Provoking considerable response, the ads lead thousands to enroll in the K. of C. correspondence instruction course and ultimately to contact priests in their communities. Among all the distinguished contributions which this order has rendered to the Church, its convert program in the form of religious ads and mail instruction courses will rank, we think, at the very top. If its example were followed by all our lay organizations, what a marked increase in converts would result.

MORE CONVERT-MINDED

For many years the NCWC news service has been syndicating a weekly feature, *Sharing Our Treasure*, telling how a lay person helped in winning one or more converts. Occasionally it features the story of a conversion as related by the convert himself. Appearing in diocesan papers from coast to coast, the feature reaches several million readers weekly, and is subsequently run in a dozen or more periodicals. It is stimulating more lay people to try their hand at leading non-Catholic friends into the fold.

A shorter feature, *The Open Door*, run for several years by the *Catholic Digest*, serves a somewhat similar purpose. Designed for priests and seminarians is the

*"It is gratifying to see the increase
of Seminary courses in Convert Making."*

monthly release of the Paulist Press, *Guide*. Edited by Father John T. McGinn, C.S.P., it reprints timely articles or papers read at conferences, dealing with the convert apostolate. A must for seminarians and priests, it is a constant reminder that the shepherd of souls must keep *au courant* with the developments in this field and observe the injunction of the greatest of all convert makers, St. Paul: "Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (*II Tim.*, 2:15).

Seeking to render on an international scale a similar service is the quarterly, *Christ to the World*, edited by Father Francis X. Legrand and published in Rome in English, French and Spanish. It presents developments in the convert movement in many countries and thus widens our vision and enriches us with new methods. In every issue the American priest will find both stimulation and practical pointers. It deserves a place in every rectory. A year's subscription costs two dollars and the address is Lungotevere, dei Vallati, 1 Rome.

Mention should be made also of the marked increase in the number of radio and television programs which bring Catholic truth into the homes of millions outside the fold, and thus arouse their curiosity and quicken their interest in learning more about our holy faith. In addition to the programs over networks, many dioceses sponsor daily or weekly programs over local stations. When this becomes the practice of every diocese, the number desiring to learn more about the Church and her teachings will reach a new high.

Significant too is the marked increase of Catholic Information Centers, with well-stocked reading rooms and reference libraries. Experience has demonstrated that hundreds will enter a store-like center, with an attractive window display, who would never go to a rectory. Such centers not only answer specific questions but also conduct Inquiry Classes at convenient hours during the day and evening. As a result they are winning large numbers of converts as well as stimulating attendance at parish classes of instruction. For several years the

Boston center topped all with a yearly average of over four hundred converts. Large cities can effectively use several such centers, while every fair-sized city will profit by having one. Worthy of note too is the increase of Bureaus of Catholic Information, now established in some sixty dioceses.

It is gratifying also to see a growing number of seminaries establishing courses in convert making, and to observe the efforts made to apply the psychological laws of learning to the instruction of catechumens, stressing the life and teachings of Christ as disclosed in the Scriptures as well as the liturgy of the Church.

The work of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, especially that of the fishers and the department of good will, is stimulating the interest of the laity in convert work and helping them to realize that they belong in this apostolate. When pastors have the majority of their parishioners organized into C.C.D. study clubs, they will have a wealth of lay auxiliaries serving not only as "bird dogs" to flush up prospects but also as co-instructors willing to explain the faith to families in their own homes.

BUREAU OF CONVERT RESEARCH

Significant too is the establishment of a Bureau of Convert Research at the University of Notre Dame to conduct studies in the psychology of conversion, in parish and diocesan Census and Information Programs, and in methods of recruiting and instructing prospective converts. It serves as a clearing house of information for bishops and priests. It has supplied information and literature to the Ordinaries of all the English speaking countries, and has helped in the spread of the Census and Information Program to dioceses not only in this country but also in Canada, Great Britain and Africa. In accordance with the suggestion of the former Apostolate Delegate, Cardinal Cicognani, it makes the pastorals and directives of one bishop available to other bishops, both far and near.

The holding of an annual National Conference on Convert Work under the aus-

pices of the Paulist Fathers is also a development worthy of note. It reflects the leadership which the Paulist Fathers have given to this movement from the time of Father Isaac Hecker to the present. The conference will serve to keep the convert apostolate in the forefront of the minds of the clergy and laity, and will stimulate all to greater efforts in this important field.

The most difficult, important and crucial part of convert work is getting non-Catholics to the Inquiry Class or rectory parlor. Once that is accomplished, the battle is more than half won. Until that is achieved, nothing happens. Without instructees the most brilliant teacher is like a mighty vessel filled with a precious cargo, unable to land. Hence every ounce of resourcefulness must be mobilized to recruit prospects for instruction. Here are some of the significant developments in this field.

The first step is the announcement of the Inquiry Class at all the Masses on the three preceding Sundays, asking the parishioners to pass the word among their non-Catholic friends and to try to bring them to the lectures. This is followed by prayer for conversions, and on the last of the three Sundays there is a public Holy Hour for Conversions. On the first Sunday a brief sermon is preached on the duty of the laity to recruit prospects. All too few realize that they are obligated to witness for Christ and to try by all prudent means to share their precious treasure with others.

Supplementing the pulpit announcements are carefully prepared notices in the public press, both in the form of news releases and of paid ads. Similar announcements on the radio and television help to blanket the community. Placards in store windows, buses, street cars, barber shops, beauty parlors and restaurants prove useful.

A dignified sign in front of the church announcing the Inquiry Class and the hours is in order. Letters to likely prospects including the non-Catholic parties in mixed marriages round out the coverage.

All these are termed "gun-shot" publicity. The idea is that if sufficient ammunition is shot in all directions, some of it will hit the target. Extensive though it be, it is far from adequate. The priest who relies entirely upon these media of mass communication will more than likely be doomed to disappointment at the slim turnout. Cer-

tainly no experienced priest could face the prospect of walking over to the first Inquiry Class without having butterflies of uncertainty fluttering fretfully in his stomach.

The unpredictability of the response to general announcements and to all forms of gun-shot publicity is notorious. Indeed it would seem that the effectiveness of pulpit appeals for attendance at Catholic Action meetings is generally in inverse proportion to the square of the number in attendance. Hence it has been found necessary to supplement all these mass media of communication with direct and immediate personal contact with individuals and small groups.

In every parish there are a few individuals, perhaps ten or twelve, upon whom each priest knows he can rely. Thus in a parish with two priests a group of perhaps twenty-five, the hard core of the faithful, is contacted and invited to meet with the priests three weeks before the start of the Inquiry Class. The members are asked to pool suggestions both as to likely prospects and as to the persons most suitable to approach them.

Each is asked to contact a dozen or two and to report the results at the next weekly meeting. After three weeks of such intensive recruiting, with week by week checks on the results, priests have found they can usually bank upon at least a workable quorum ranging from ten to twenty prospects who are brought to the class by their sponsors. While not infallible, the earnest work of such a carefully selected group of "old dependables" has been found to yield as large a measure of certainty as regards getting at least a quorum as can be found.

LEGION OF MARY

Made to order for such recruiting is, of course, the Legion of Mary. Fortunate indeed is the parish which has several praesidia: their members represent a group of dependable workers similar to the improvised group just mentioned. It is to the recruiting work of the Legionnaires that Bishop Floyd L. Begin, pastor of St. Agnes parish, Cleveland, chiefly attributes his yearly average of over one hundred converts. Many other pastors have found them equally effective.

While parishioners may be rightly asked to recruit prospects, they can scarcely be expected to do all of it, while the pastor

*"When two or more priests are available
the practice of giving alternate instructions is increasing."*

remains like a general in the rear headquarters. No one is better trained or qualified to do this work than a priest. Indeed in these days when one-third of city dwellers move every year, it is an unmistakable duty which he can no longer shirk. It is implicit in the description which Christ Himself gives of the true shepherd when He says, "I am the Good Shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me" (*John*, 10:14).

The daily visitation of homes is effective in cities and in the country. It was the hour a day spent in calling at homes in Eau Claire that enabled Father A. B. C. Dunne to gain more than a thousand converts. It was the hours spent by Fathers Leonard Weber and Gerald Noessen in calling personally at every home in their Blackduck, Minnesota, mission, comprising 10,000 square miles, that enabled them to gain four times as many converts per year as the average obtaining in their diocese.

"Father," said a pastor in a western diocese, "I have made it a practice to devote at least one hour each day or evening to calling at all the homes within my parish. It enables me to dig up non-practicing Catholics, to recruit prospects for our Inquiry Class which meets twice weekly throughout the year, to nip tendencies toward defection in the bud, to forestall ill-advised marriages, to win the good will of outsiders and to quicken the spiritual life of our own people. It's the most fruitful hour of the day and the most interesting. I would no more think of missing it than I would think of omitting my Office."

When this growing practice of pastors and assistants becomes the standard procedure for all, there will be no dearth of prospects for the Inquiry Class, no matter how frequently it is conducted. Parishioners will follow the example of their spiritual shepherds, and thus every parish will become a throbbing center of missionary activity. An analysis of some 500 conversions shows that there are only about eight basic methods of recruiting converts and these are set forth with illustrations for the laity in the book, *You Too Can Win Souls* (Macmillan Co.).

A significant development in the recruit-

ing of prospects is the Open House. This is usually held in the school hall, where Catholics bring their non-Catholic friends and neighbors and have a social visit with light refreshments. Later they are taken on a tour through the church, where the pastor explains the statues, paintings, figures in the stained glass windows, altar, Mass vestments and utensils, and the inside of the confessionals. They are frequently also taken through the parish school and given an opportunity to meet the Sisters in the convent. They are then invited to the parish Inquiry Class, usually starting that week.

Among the developments in methods of instructing converts the following procedures are, we think, worthy of note and are rapidly becoming standard practice. A half hour before the Inquiry Class the priest instructor makes a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, praying to the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide him so that he will speak prudently and wisely. Then he goes to the lecture room, and greets the people as they arrive, welcoming each in a friendly manner.

ALTERNATE INSTRUCTORS

If the group is quite large, it is well to have another priest and members of the Legion of Mary or other parishioners assist him throughout the course, meeting the people, distributing literature, answering questions, keeping the attendance record, and serving as sponsors at the baptism. Where two or more priests are available, it is often advantageous to have them alternate instructions. At the Gesu Church in Milwaukee three priests take turns, and the results are excellent. Here we shall assume that one priest is conducting the Inquiry Class.

The twenty-five minutes before the class enables the priest to have brief little chats with a number of individuals, during which he can learn something of the religious background of each and how he became interested. Legionnaires can do the same and thus help him in getting a close-up of each. This practice should be continued

throughout the course. It helps to create an atmosphere of friendliness, with the priests getting to know each one and the members of the class becoming acquainted with one another as well as with the Catholic lay helpers.

The Inquiry or Information Class, as it is frequently called, meets twice a week at the time and place found to be most convenient. Each class opens and closes with prayer, beginning with the Lord's Prayer and proceeding gradually to the other common prayers, bringing in the Hail Mary somewhat later. All should be encouraged to join in the recitation and to learn the prayer by heart. This puts the instruction in the framework of religion and kindles a spark of piety and devotion in the members.

Stress is placed upon punctuality and regularity of attendance. It is well, we have found, to provide each with a good catechism, a larger manual of instruction so he can read more extensively on the subject of each lecture, and a book of conversion stories in which converts tell of the great help, peace and happiness which the Catholic faith has brought to them. These are human testimonies which can serve a divine purpose in encouraging the instructors to persevere and to take the important final step.

The lecture should end punctually, rarely exceeding an hour. Some instructors find it helpful to give the class a midway "break" of a couple minutes, having them take a sort of seventh inning stretch. The instructor must be unfailingly courteous, kind, affable, gracious and considerate. "There are three rules," as Bishop Sheen has well observed, "for winning converts: 1. kindness, 2. Kindness, 3. *Kindness*."

REVIEW IS NEEDED

It is well to begin each lecture with a two-minute review. It is desirable to cover a complete topic and to illustrate the chief points with charts, pictures, incidents, anecdotes or stories, which help so much in holding the interest. Usually the simpler the language, the more effective is the presentation. An occasional pleasantry relieves the tension and helps to put all at ease.

It is generally better, especially when the

attendance is fairly large, to defer questions to the end so the continuity of the presentation will not be broken. Only those who have questions need to remain, and when the question will require considerable time to answer, the questioner may well be asked to wait until the others have been answered. Indeed many experienced instructors prefer to take the questioners individually and thus relieve them of any embarrassment in case their query should appear a bit freakish to others.

If no questioners remain, the instructor will find this a good opportunity to have a couple of persons remain so he can have a little chat with each, ascertain how each is progressing, and thus keep his finger on the pulse of the class. In addition, he should assign longer periods for occasional interviews with each, and speak earnest words of encouragement to them. Thus he is able to achieve a happy blend of the best points of the individual and group method of instruction. By keeping in close touch with each individual he is able to instruct forty or more with substantially the same effectiveness as one, and usually with greater relaxation on the part of the instructee.

Immediately upon the close of the lecture and the assignment for the next class, the final prayer is recited, the class is thanked for their attention, and the priest, standing at the door, bids each "good night." Then he gives his attention to any who remain for questions or for private conferences. During the last two or three weeks he has a conference with each individual to see if he is ready to embrace the faith and to help clear up any obstacle. While the importance of daily prayer, attendance at Sunday Mass, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament should be stressed throughout the course, they merit a special emphasis during the closing weeks that with God's help each may decide aright.

It is a common practice to receive the class on a Saturday afternoon, with a priest in the pulpit explaining the ceremonies of baptism. At a well-attended Sunday Mass it is well to have the converts, along with their sponsors, repeat after the priest a few paragraphs of the profession of faith. Few Catholics have ever heard or seen any of this. The sound of their voices pledging loyalty to God and Church as well as the sight of a goodly number helps our Catho-

"A census program provides numerous leads that offer fruitful work for many years."

lies to realize that the Church is a missionary organization, that converts are coming into the Church as in the days of the Apostles, and that they should try to enlarge the number.

It is well to assign a Big Brother or a Big Sister to each convert to help him or her in the steadfast practice of the faith and particularly to go to confession and Communion each Sunday for the next several years. Such a sponsor can likewise help to integrate the convert into the life of the parish and to enroll him in the appropriate organizations. He must not be left to shift for himself, but should be inducted as quickly as possible into full participation in the social, educational and religious life of the parish.

Many additional pointers on methods of instructing prospective converts are presented in the three books, *Winning Converts* (University of Notre Dame Press), *Sharing the Faith* (Our Sunday Visitor Press) and *Bringing Souls to Christ* (Hanover House). In these volumes some fifty leaders in the convert movement in this country and in England cover virtually every phase of the convert apostolate. They are admirably suited for use as textbooks in seminaries.

CONVERT CLUBS

In an increasingly large number of parishes Convert Clubs are being established to safeguard and deepen the faith of converts, accelerate their social integration, and thus develop a splendid body of recruiters. Composed of converts, their Catholic spouses, and other "cradle" Catholics of apostolic zeal, such organizations eliminate any feeling of isolation or loneliness on the part of the convert. The program for the meetings is partly social and partly cultural, and enables all the members to get a deeper grasp particularly of the devotions and liturgy of the Church.

It is well to encourage the converts to lead discussions on the doctrines and practices of the faith so that their initiative and leadership in spreading the faith will be properly developed. It is important to ar-

range the monthly program with great care so that a full attendance is secured. Such clubs may well be encouraged to affiliate with the Guild of St. Paul, a national organization with offices at 438 West Second Street, Lexington, Kentucky. Properly organized and operated, the Convert Club can be a most effective agency for the recruitment of prospects for Inquiry Classes.

Outstanding among all the developments in the convert apostolate is the Catholic Census and Information Program, also called Crusade for Souls or Operation Doorbell. Launched for the first time in 1951 in the San Diego diocese, it has spread to some thirty-five dioceses from coast to coast, into Canada, Great Britain and Africa, and has been conducted on the parish, diocesan, state and provincial level.

It comprises the two most effective means for the winning of converts: 1. The enlistment of the laity to take a Catholic census by calling at all the homes in the area, to locate non-practicing Catholics and to try to bring them back to the faith, and to interest non-Catholics in attending parish Inquiry Classes. 2. The establishment of an Inquiry Class, conducting several complete courses a year, in every parish in a diocese.

The Census Program offers no magic formula for the effortless winning of converts: it requires prayer, work, sweat and a strenuous shoe leather apostolate. It enlists all the faithful of a diocese in a month-long crusade of prayer; it mobilizes thousands of lay canvassers to do what they never did before—call at homes to urge the strayed to return and to invite those outside the fold to come and learn what the Catholic Church has to offer.

It has met with varying degrees of success in different dioceses, depending largely upon the thoroughness of the spiritual and educational preparation, the training of the lay canvassers and the zeal of the shepherds. While it has usually netted, a substantial number of converts and reclaimed fallenaways, probably its greatest effect is upon our own laity and especially upon the canvassers. It has made them realize as never before that they have an

important role to play in the extension of Christ's kingdom, a role that is not satisfied by the attendance at Sunday Mass and the dropping of an offering in the collection box.

The census opens up so many leads to prospective converts and non-practicing Catholics as to provide fruitful work for several years. Indeed modified census programs should be conducted annually to keep the missionary spirit alive among the laity as well as to reap the full harvest of the seed sown so widely by the original all-out census. This the archdiocese of St. Louis has done in a splendid manner since its initial census in 1954, thus setting an inspiring example for the nation.

"As a result of the Census Program," reported the *St. Louis Register*, "some 1,100 converts came into the Church, 600 lapsed Catholics returned to the sacraments, and nearly 1,500 others responded to the invitation to take instructions by mail. When you consider the fact that multitudes of Catholics also took the opportunity to go to the Information Forums to review their catechism, the total result is that more than 10,000 in all benefited by the campaign."

Thus 883 of the total increase of 2,192 converts in 1956 over the preceding year took place in the six dioceses of Indianapolis, Evansville, Lafayette, Fort Wayne, Alexandria and Lafayette (Louisiana), which that year conducted Census Programs. This means that these six dioceses accounted for 40% of the total increase registered by the 128 dioceses of the United States.

The latest report comes from the Buffalo diocese which launched a Census Program last fall. Monsignor Francis A. Growney reports that 40,000 canvassers calling at all the homes in the diocese unearthed 88,670 unlisted Catholics, 52,466 lax or inactive Catholics, and 60,218 unaffiliated with any Church. As a result of the number recruited for the Inquiry Classes, they received 2,000 converts who were confirmed in June in

GUIDE

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GUIDE

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three separate ceremonies. Thus during the first six months of 1959 they exceeded last year's total of 1,502 by 498 converts.

Our Holy Father, Pope John XXIII, has sent his warm commendation of the Catholic Census and Information Program and his blessing upon all who participate therein, especially the lay workers.

In short, the developments over the past thirty years disclose the following significant facts: 1. The increase of converts is traceable largely to the enlistment of more of the laity as recruiters and to the increase of parish Inquiry Classes. 2. A definite program for convert work is needed in parishes and in dioceses to get the best results. It is a long journey to the day when we shall have won for Christ the hundred million churchless people of America, but the longest journey begins with a single step, and that step is an organized convert program in every parish and every diocese.

The decisive thing about the Church's Catechesis is . . . the manner in which the future clergy learn the religion they are going to teach: real or notional, life or legality, Wonderful News or Denziger-and-soda.

THE SOWER.

Guide Lights

RETREATS FOR NON-CATHOLICS . . .

Will non-Catholics make a closed retreat? How can they be persuaded to do so? How should such a retreat be conducted? How will they react to these spiritual exercises? These were the questions that faced Fathers John Reynolds and John Bradley of the Paulist Fathers' Mission Band in New York City when invited to conduct such a retreat at the Elkins Park, Pa., retreat house.

Step number one was to win the active, informed co-operation of the retreat promoters. So it was suggested that at their annual conference they study the topic: "Our Separated Brethren." Some material, especially selected from back issues of *Guide*, was provided for the discussion leaders. The promoters met in four groups with a chairman and three speakers. The main subjects discussed were: The Apostolate to non-Catholics Today; The Laity and Winning Converts; Talking About Religion; and The Aftercare of Converts.

Stimulated and enlightened by these discussions, the promoters remembered neighbors, relatives, friends and fellow workers who might be regarded as good prospects. And when the retreat opened fifty-one retreatants were on hand. (40 of them were non-Catholics; 12 were men; 6 married couples attended.) The most successful promoter was a WAVE who came with seven other Protestant WAVES. In age, the group ranged from those in their twenties to middle age. All had at least a high school education.

Promoters were agreed that some non-Catholics accepted their invitation because they were already deeply interested in the Church. Other non-Catholics, although without any powerful attraction to the Church, were eager to get away from the noise and distractions of daily life to think about the needs of their souls.

Retreat conferences were concerned with the four last things, with special emphasis on the positive aspect of these truths and their basic importance for a Christian philosophy of life. Prayers and hymns were carefully selected. One conference was a dialogue between the two priests on the subject of "Confession." A "Question Box" period was arranged for the first day and a period on the second day was reserved for questions from the floor.

The immediate results were sufficiently gratifying to encourage all retreat houses to consider one or more "Retreats for non-Catholics" each year. Retreat promoters were made aware of a very large number of potential retreatants who have not always received sufficient consideration. Seven of the retreatants immediately arranged to take instructions with a view to becoming Catholics. Eighteen of the non-Catholic retreatants took the trouble to write enthusiastic "Thank you" notes.

Aspects of the retreat which were especially commended: the surroundings and atmosphere conducive to prayer and serious religious thought; the sublimity of Catholic spiritual ideals; opportunity to ask questions frankly about the Church; the utter lack of any undue pressure to "rope" people into the Church.

SELF-EXAMINATION . . .

The current stock-taking by American Catholics recently took another huge advance. "The Present Position of Catholics in America" was the theme of the notable symposium sponsored jointly by the Thomas More Association and the library science department of Rosary College in Chicago. Religious leaders and laymen discussed the tensions between Catholics and their neighbors from the perspectives of theology, history and sociology.

Bishop John King Mussio of Stubenville, Ohio, observed that for a religious man, the freedom we enjoy is a healthy climate for the preservation of faith. "Under its protection a man can follow out the dictates of his properly formed conscience. We Catholics know that as this freedom applies to us, it also applies to all others. And we know that every time its true spirit is violated by anyone, all who participate in its blessings suffer. . . . It is elementary fact to the Catholic that killing freedom for others is singing its requiem for us."

The touchy problem of Church and State was discussed by John Cogley, member of the executive staff of the Fund for the Republic. He remarked that the assurance Catholics give non-Catholics is not "wholly reassuring because the thesis about the duties of a 'Catholic State' not only exists in our theological textbooks, and is taught in some American Catholic classrooms, but is actually put in practice in a few Catholic

countries . . . and instances of religious intolerance in these countries are rarely, if ever, even criticized in the American Catholic press."

The same topic was reviewed from another angle by Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, professor of Church history at the Catholic University of America. He ascribed non-Catholic misgivings about the Church to traditional historical teachings which hold that if Catholics become a majority, the freedom of others would be curtailed. He referred to "another school of thought in Catholic theology that has espoused a belief in universal religious freedom." He remarked that this other school of thinking "finds its theological basis in the necessary freedom that there must be for the act of faith, in other words, in the sanctity of the individual conscience." As a consequence, even if Catholics became a majority in this country, they would have no "theological commitment" to "bring about the union of Church and State or proceed to curtail or suppress the religious freedom of those outside the Church."

The universally respected U. S. Senator Eugene J. McCarthy of Minnesota severely criticized those Catholics who "look upon almost every campaign or political effort in the nature of a crusade." Such an attitude he condemned as an "oversimplification." He disagreed with those who regard politics as a "dirty business," and who consider that "the really good citizen is the independent voter who remains aloof from the nastiness of party politics." Striking at the view that government is scarcely better than a necessary evil, he believed that Catholics like most other Americans have been "strongly influenced" by an "erroneous pessimistic concept of the nature and function of government."

CATHOLIC GHETTO . . .

A recent editorial in *The Commonweal* discusses a topic of supreme importance to Catholics in America: Do American Catholics still live in a ghetto? If so, how can they leave the ghetto for fuller participation in our national life? Or do they, possibly, properly belong in the ghetto? . . .

Monsignor De Blanc, director of the National Catholic Family Life Bureau, called for an "open ghetto" which would allow Catholics to avoid undue exposure to non-Catholic culture. "I don't think a Protestant should seriously date a Catholic, and vice versa. Of course we want to get to know and do business with persons of other faiths, but I wonder if a devout person should bring someone of another faith into

his home, into his family surroundings. Catholics should not have close associates who are in a different religious situation. You soon compromise with a cultural pattern."

The immediate cause of Monsignor De Blanc's statement seemed to be his concern over an "alarming, arresting and provocative finding" which indicates, though inconclusively, that Catholics use contraceptives almost as readily as non-Catholics. Apparently judging that Catholics are conforming their actions to the present standards of society rather than to the teachings of the Church, Monsignor De Blanc's response was for Catholics to withdraw, partially, from the society.

While such a proposal may be understandable as an immediate reaction, it is unacceptable as planned policy. Our society is, regrettably, becoming increasingly secularized, and the religious person cannot be terribly at ease in a secularized society. His beliefs, his style of life, his most basic commitments are being constantly challenged. But the challenge must be met; it cannot simply be avoided. The secularized society will not be transformed because we look the other way.

To say that the American Catholic should withdraw from full participation in the national life of his country is to imply that Catholicism is incongruent with or unequal to the best of modern thought; it implies that Catholics are less secure than their fellow Americans and will readily compromise and yield their principles; it implies that their Catholic faith is something to protect and shield rather than something to cherish and share; it implies that possession of what is true and good is a barrier rather than a bridge to understanding, compassion and love for another person; it implies that it is better to withdraw from society and judge it from a safe distance rather than to engage oneself and to help shape that society.

Surely these are untenable positions. The American Catholic is properly proud of his achievements in this country. But those achievements were gained because he was eager and able to participate in American life. The Catholic in America has not yet reached the time for relaxation and withdrawal—if such a time does, indeed, exist. Now, as much as ever, he must be willing to engage himself with those who differ with him, to be as generous in accepting as in proffering truths. This is a hard task and it involves some risks, but a transcendent religion does not promise total peace and final security in this world.